Asking for support when pain is invisible

Practical words for needs that other people may not see.



Pain can be real even when other people cannot see it. Being believed and supported matters. If explaining yourself feels tiring, you deserve care that takes your experience seriously. [1, 2]
This sheet includes words you can borrow, because talking with someone you trust, or with a professional, can make difficult things feel more manageable.

You do not have to explain everything

These optional examples are here to lend you words. Change them to sound like you, or leave them aside. You can start with one person and one small request.

1 Name what would help today

Would listening, practical help, company or a change of plan be useful? Say what you need and when you need it.

"Could you collect the shopping this evening? Carrying it is difficult today."

"Could we talk for ten minutes? I would like you to listen; I am not looking for solutions."

One thing that would help me today...

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2 Leave room for changing capacity

Pain and what you can manage may vary. A better day does not cancel out a difficult one. [2]

"I would like to come, but may need to leave early. Can we agree that in advance?"

"I managed that yesterday; today is different. Could we try a shorter visit, or another day?"

If our original plan is too much, an alternative could be...

Keep room for choice

You choose what to share and with whom. If someone cannot help, you can ask what they can offer or approach another person. Needing support does not mean you have failed.

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Finding words, finding support

You deserve care for the whole experience.

When a response hurts

An unhelpful response does not mean you explained yourself badly. If it feels safe, you might say:

"Comparing my pain with someone else's does not help me. Could you ask what I need?"

"I am keeping treatment decisions with my care team. Please check before sending more advice."

You can pause the conversation

You do not have to convince everyone before seeking support. You can keep medical details private and ask for flexibility.

3 Prepare for your next care appointment

Note what has changed, what daily life is like and what matters most to you. You can ask to bring someone you trust. [2, 3]

"What needs reassessing? Which changes should prompt urgent help?"

"What are my options, their benefits and risks, and when will we review the plan?"

Support alongside medical care

Contact your GP (family doctor) or care team about new, worsening or different symptoms. For a medical emergency, use the emergency numbers below. Mention emotional strain too. Chronic Pain Ireland (chronicpain.ie) has information and a support line; elsewhere, ask your care team about local support. [2, 3]

When you need someone to talk to, day or night

Samaritans 116 123 (Ireland, UK); text HELLO to 50808 (Ireland); call or text 988 (US, Canada); Lifeline 13 11 14 (Australia); elsewhere, findahelpline.com lists free helplines. For urgent advice, contact your GP, out-of-hours service or care team. Immediate danger: use the emergency numbers below. [4]

Sources and further reading

Original prompts, informed by the guidance below. Choose what fits; these are not tested treatments.

1. IASP: understanding pain (www.iasp-pain.org)
2. NICE NG193: chronic pain assessment (2021) (www.nice.org.uk)
3. Chronic Pain Ireland: preparing for appointments (chronicpain.ie)
4. HSE: urgent mental health support (www2.hse.ie)

Sources checked 3 October 2026. Independent resource; no endorsement implied. Support lines checked 25 October 2026.

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